

Massachusetts In Contention

A Chronological Survey 1775-1783

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Washington entering Boston after the Evacuation by the British, March 17th 1776

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Commonwealth of Massachusetts
Bicentennial Commission Publication
February, 1975



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FRONT COVER: Political banner used for
Evacuation Day Centennial 1876,
depicting General George Washington
entering Boston after the evacuation by
the British, March 17, 1776.

Courtesy of Bostonian Society

Preface

Massachusetts In Contention: A Chronological Survey, 1775-1783, is one of a series of pamphlets issued by the Massachusetts Revolutionary War Bicentennial Commission. The chronology lists the events in the Province of Massachusetts Bay at the outbreak of the Revolution, and traces the history of the Commonwealth through the turbulent war years, to the ultimate signing of the Treaty of Paris.

The Massachusetts Bicentennial Commission was created "to observe the events which preceded the Revolutionary War in this Commonwealth." That period was perhaps the most creative in the history of American political thought, for it witnessed, in the form of pamphlets, a massive outpouring of social and political ideas. As Professor Bernard Bailyn, Harvard History Professor and member of the commission, said, "Pamphlets were the distinctive literature of the American Revolution . . . they revealed the contemporary meaning of that transforming event."

Pamphleteers of the Revolutionary era used the medium to investigate premises, to develop arguments, and to consider conclusions. Their primary goal, as Bailyn says, was "not to overthrow . . . the existing social order, but the preservation of liberty." Pamphlets were thus manifestations of intellectual argument over forms of government and the natural rights of men.

Writers such as James Otis, Thomas Jefferson, and most notable, Thomas Paine, argued on behalf of a new social and political order. Pamphlets such as Paine's *Age of Reason* successfully answered the philosophy expressed by Edmund Burke. Paine urged a replacement of the rule of law with the rule of reason. Such an ideological contention confirmed the place of our founders as "counter-revolutionaries," dedicated to a principle, affirming the rights of man and his ability to control his own destiny.

This pamphlet outlines the events which surrounded the colonials' intellectual contentions. And, it is issued at a time when the basic tenets which Revolutionary writers propounded appear to be threatened once more. We are again experiencing an era when confidence in government is low and our commitment to individual rights is waning. As Thomas Paine said:

These are the times that try men's souls. The summer soldier and the sunshine patriot will, in this crisis, shrink from the service of their country. . . . Heaven knows how to put a proper price upon its goods, and it would be strange indeed if so celestial an article as freedom should not be highly rated.

What better way, then, to celebrate the bicentennial than in a pamphlet? Through study and understanding of the events which are outlined here, we can reaffirm our ancestors' commitment to principle, and restore to their full meaning our basic beliefs.

Chester G. Atkins
Senate Chairman

Vincent J. Piro
House Chairman

Introduction

The good reception given the first volume of chronology entitled *Massachusetts in Ferment*, which covered the dozen or so years preceding the American Revolution, has encouraged the authors of this work to continue the chronology through the war years to the end of 1783.

We are aware that we have merely scratched the surface in this presentation. There were many more events in Massachusetts worthy of mention in the period from 1775 to 1783, but the limitations of time and space have forced us to select the outstanding occurrences in the war period.

We are grateful to Dr. Stephen T. Riley, of the Massachusetts Historical Society, Professor Bernard Bailyn, of Harvard University, and Dr. Richard W. Hale, State Archivist, who reviewed this book and suggested revisions. We are also indebted to several of our colleagues at Bridgewater State College for reading the manuscript and making suggestions; to Senator Chester G. Atkins and Representative Vincent J. Piro, co-chairmen of the Massachusetts Bicentennial Commission, who encouraged its publication; and to Mr. Edward A. McColgan, Executive Director of the Commission, and to Miss Mary Darcy, Executive Secretary, who approved the concept and reviewed the manuscript for final publication; to Mrs. Irene Green, who served as our typist, and to the students in the senior seminar in the American Revolution at Bridgewater State College in the spring of 1974, who gave us a number of valuable leads to explore. For any shortcomings in style or errors in fact, we assume full responsibility.

Jordan D. Fiore

Jean F. Stonehouse

Bridgewater
December 15, 1974

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A Adams

Massachusetts In Contention: A Chronological Survey, 1775-1783

1775

- April 18** Gage orders Lt. Col. Francis Smith to lead a force of 700 men to destroy supplies at Concord.
Paul Revere, William Dawes and Dr. Samuel Prescott set out to warn the countryside. Revere and Dawes, using separate routes, warn Minute Men from Boston to Lexington. Prescott carries the warning to Concord.
- April 19** British forces and Massachusetts Minute Men clash on Lexington Green. Eight Americans are killed and ten are wounded. British proceed to Concord and destroy some stores. There they engage in a skirmish with patriots from surrounding communities. On their return to Charlestown the British suffer heavy casualties in guerilla fighting.
The siege of Boston by American troops begins.
The Committee of Safety forwards news of Lexington to other colonies
- April 23** The Provincial Congress assembles, authorizes the raising of 13,000 men from Massachusetts, makes Artemas Ward Commander-in-Chief, and appeals to other colonies for aid. Congress sends an account of the Lexington fight to Great Britain with depositions to prove that the British were the aggressors. The Congress addresses a letter to the King, professing loyalty but indicating determination "not tamely to submit to the persecution and tyranny of his evil ministry."
- April 27** Gage agrees that inhabitants of Boston might leave that town with their effects by land and water.
- April 30** Provincial Congress votes to allow a request that people in the country who wish to enter Boston with their effects might do so.
- May 3** Committee of Safety takes initial steps to secure house furnishings of absent Loyalists and to deposit them in places of safety.
- May 5** The Provincial Congress resolves that General Gage "ought to be considered and guarded against, as an unnatural and inveterate enemy of the country."

A manifesto is issued against Gage because he has "conducted as an instrument in the hands of an arbitrary ministry to enslave this people," and he has, "by these means and many others, utterly disqualified himself to serve this colony as governor and in every other capacity. . . ."

The *Falcon*, British sloop of war, which had seized several prizes in the Buzzard's Bay area, is attacked by a vessel fitted out by New Bedford and Dartmouth men. They cut out one of the prizes and take fifteen prisoners from a harbor in Martha's Vineyard.

- May 8** The Committees of Correspondence and selectmen of the towns are authorized to disarm all who would not give assurance of good intent and regard to the country's interest.
- May 12** Provincial Congress creates a committee to report "an application to the Continental Congress for obtaining their recommendation for this colony to take up and exercise civil government as soon as may be. . . ."
- May 16** The Provincial Congress again asks the Continental Congress for advice about the formation of a civil government and asks that Congress accept the troops around Boston as a nucleus for a Continental Army.
- May 22** The Provincial Congress votes to sequester the estates of Tories.
- May 24** John Hancock is elected President of the Second Continental Congress meeting in Philadelphia.
- May 25** British generals William Howe, John Burgoyne, and Henry Clinton arrive in Boston, with additional troops.
- May 27** The Provincial Congress creates a court of inquiry of seven persons "to hear all complaints against any person or persons for treason against the constitution of this country, or other breaches of the public peace and security, and to determine and make judgment thereon according to the laws of this province and those of reason and equity."
- May 30** The patriot version of the Lexington-Concord fight is published in London some ten days or so ahead of the version sent by the British.
- May 31** A party of Americans under Colonel Lemuel Robinson land on Peddock's Island in Boston harbor and remove 500 sheep and 30 head of cattle.
- June 1** At Watertown the members of the annual convention of clergy express their "sympathy for the distresses of their much injured and oppressed country."
- June 2** Americans under Major Groaton land on Deer Island,

take about 800 sheep and lambs, some cattle, a barge, and several prisoners. The Massachusetts memorial about a state government is read before the Continental Congress.

- June 7** The Provincial Congress appoints a committee "to consider the expediency of establishing a number of small armed vessels, to cruise on our sea coasts, for the protection of our trade, and the annoyance of our enemies. . . ."
- June 9** The Second Continental Congress, in response to a request for advice on procedure by the Massachusetts Provincial Congress, advises that body to form a temporary government, under the provisions of the 1691 Charter, in the emergency of the royal governor not being able to serve.
- June 10** John Adams at the Second Continental Congress proposes that Congress should accept the American troops near Boston as a Continental army and should appoint a general, hinting that George Washington of Virginia should be named.
- June 12** Governor Gage issues a proclamation in Boston declaring martial law in the province and in the King's name offering pardon to all persons "who shall forthwith lay down their arms, and return to the duties of peaceable subjects, excepting only from the benefits of such pardon, Samuel Adams and John Hancock, whose offences are too flagitious a nature to admit of any other consideration, than that of condign punishment."
- June 13** Provincial Congress appoints a committee to consider Gage's proclamation, and a counter-proclamation is prepared to pardon all offenders against the rights and liberties of the country except Thomas Gage, Samuel Graves, the Mandamus Commissioners Sewall, Patton, and Hallowell, and native Americans not in the army or navy who went with regular troops on April 19.
- June 14** A convention held at Worcester resolves "that we abhor the enslaving of any of the human race, and particularly of the negroes in this country; and that, whenever there shall be a door opened, or opportunity presented, for any thing to be done towards the emancipation of the negroes, we will use our influence and endeavor that such a thing may be brought about."
- June 15** The Committee of Safety recommends to the Council of War that Bunker Hill be immediately fortified.
- June 17** British troops attack American forces on Breed's Hill in Charlestown and rout American forces there and on

nearby Bunker Hill. The British sustain heavy losses and fail to follow up their advantage, thus allowing Americans to regroup in Cambridge. American losses include Major General Joseph Warren, the distinguished physician and patriot, and British losses include Major John Pitcairn, who had been second in command at Lexington.

June 19 Gage issues a proclamation requiring inhabitants to surrender their arms at the courthouse or be deemed enemies of the king's government.

A call is issued for the election of a provincial assembly.

June 21 The Provincial Congress declares that every town is to be a guardian of abandoned estates. The selectmen and committees of correspondence are to improve the estates and keep an account of rents and profits.

June 25 Massachusetts issues an appeal to the governments of Rhode Island, Connecticut, and New Hampshire for more troops.

July 3 George Washington arrives in Cambridge and takes charge of the Continental troops there.

July 8 Troops under Majors Benjamin Tupper and John Crane attack a British advance post on Boston Neck. The guard is routed, and the guard post is burned.

July 11 American troops again attack the guard at Boston Neck and burn Brown's store. In the evening a successful attack is made on Long Island, and fifteen prisoners plus cattle, sheep, and hogs are taken.

July 12 Americans under Colonel John Groaton again attack Long Island and burn all buildings. On this day six transports containing British soldiers arrive in Boston harbor.

July 13 More skirmishing takes place on Long Island with no losses. British cannonade troops in Roxbury with no damage.

The Massachusetts Provincial Congress gives Committee of Safety full executive power until July 30.

July 18 Captain Derby returns to Boston with news of the effect of the dispatches about Lexington which he had carried to London.

July 19 The Massachusetts Provincial Congress dissolves.

July 20 James Warren, then President of the Provincial Congress, acting on the advice of the Continental Congress, had asked the towns to elect representatives to the General Court. They did so, and the representatives meet on this day at Watertown, elect Warren as Speaker of the House of Representatives, and then elect a Council. These two bodies then proceed to legislate for the province.

- July 21** An attack upon Nantasket lighthouse by Major Vose and his men on two successive days is successful. Barley and hay are removed. A British armed schooner and barges engage the Americans, and two Americans are wounded.
The Massachusetts Council organizes and elects James Bowdoin president.
- July 24** The House of Representatives authorizes the payment of a sum by the Receiver-General, in the only action taken in the history of the “resumed” charter without the council’s consent.
- July 26** Riflemen from other provinces begin to pour into Cambridge and become an important part of the Continental forces there.
- July 31** Major Tupper and 300 men attack British troops engaged in rebuilding the lighthouse at Nantasket. American losses are one man killed and several wounded, and the British lose fifty-three men killed or captured.
- August 5** Adoption of the Revolutionary Colony Seal (now on the reverse side of the Bicentennial medal).
- August 9** The British war vessel *Falcon*, Captain Linzee commanding, sights two schooners from West Indies bound for Salem. One vessel is captured and the other is pursued into Salem harbor. Linzee sends in barges which are attacked by the local militia. Linzee fires into town doing little damage. Americans capture the two schooners, the cutter, the barges, and thirty-five members of the crews, ten of whom prove to be impressed American seamen.
- August 10** Concerned about provisions coming in to help the besieged British, the House of Representatives resolves that “after the fifteenth day of August . . . , no Ship or Vessel shall sail out of any Port in this Colony on any whaling voyage whatever, . . .” without permission from the General Court.
Samuel Adams is elected Secretary of the Province of Massachusetts.
- August 11** General Washington writes to General Gage protesting the treatment of American prisoners in Boston jails and suggesting that he might be forced to retaliate.
- August 13** Gage replies to Washington’s letter and denies the prisoners are being treated inhumanely considering the fact that they are criminals, “whose lives, by the law, are destined to the cord.” He, in turn, complains about inhumane treatment of British prisoners.

- August 21** Benedict Arnold begins inquiries about obtaining bateaux and supplies for the Quebec expedition.
- August 23** The General Court passes an act declaring the "Right of Certain Towns and Districts in the Colony of the Massachusetts Bay in New England to Elect and Depute a Representative or Representatives to Serve for and Represent them in Any Great and General Court or Assembly, at Any Time to be Held and Kept for the Service of the Said Colony." All towns with thirty or more qualified voters might elect representatives.
- August 28** Washington having seized and fortified Ploughed Hill, a low eminence on the road connecting Charlestown Neck with Medford, two days earlier, the British now form a column at Bunker Hill in preparation for an attack on the American entrenchments. The Americans have 5,000 men in waiting, but, although there is some British fire on the entrenchments, the attack does not take place.
- September 1** A number of merchants in Falmouth, on Cape Cod, who on February 10, 1774, had signed a letter praising Governor Hutchinson and had subscribed to the Falmouth Resolves, now publicly renounce their former statement and ask for forgiveness of the public.
- September 2** Washington, authorizing the conversion of fishing vessels into armed ships, commissions Nicholas Broughton as a captain in the army. He is directed to take a crew aboard the schooner "*Hannah*, at Beverly . . . to cruise against such Vessels as may be found on the High Seas or elsewhere . . . and to take and seize all such vessels."
- September 5** Washington releases plans to send 1051 volunteers under Arnold on the expedition against Quebec.
- September 7** The *Hannah* under Captain Nicholas Broughton returns to port with her first capture, the British vessel, the *Unity*, with fish, provisions, lumber, and naval stores.
- September 19** Arnold's troops sail from Newburyport, and late that day they reach the mouth of the Kennebec.
- September 24** Arnold's troops reach Fort Western (Augusta), thirty miles up the Kennebec River, the starting point for his expedition against Quebec.
- September 26** General Gage receives orders to return to England, and General William Howe is named to succeed him as commander of the British forces in America.
- September 28** The House of Representatives appoints a committee to consider authorizing privateers.
- September 30** On several days in the preceding month there have been many quarrels between the Council and the House of

Representatives over the control of military appointments.

- October 3** For the next two days, Dr. Benjamin Church, Jr., is tried by the general officers of the army on the charge that he had carried on a criminal correspondence with the enemy. He is found guilty, and the board agrees to confine him until the Continental Congress determines his punishment.
- October 6** Captain Henry Mowat with the British warships *Canceau* (8 guns) and *Halifax* (6 guns) is ordered to "burn, destroy, and lay waste the seaport towns along the north-east coast as far as Machias, Maine, and to destroy their shipping."
- October 16** Captain Mowat of H.M.S. *Canceau* in Falmouth (Portland) harbor gives the people of that town two hours to evacuate, so that he might "execute a just punishment" on it. After some bargaining he agrees to postpone the action for a day.
- October 18** The people of Falmouth (Portland), Maine, refuse to give Mowat cannon, arms, ammunition, and hostages, so his ships shell the town and destroy more than 400 buildings. Eleven American vessels are burned, and four are captured.
- October 27** The Light Horse 17th Regiment of Dragoons take possession of the Old South Meeting House. They rip out the pulpit, pews, and seats, and use the building for a *riding* school.
- October 28** Dr. Benjamin Church, Jr., found guilty by court-martial on October 3 and 4, is brought before the House of Representatives, of which he is a member.
- November 1** The Massachusetts Council approves an "Act for fixing out Armed Vessels to defend the Sea-Coast of America, and for erecting a Court of Justice, to try and condemn all Vessels that should be found infesting the same."
- November 2** The Massachusetts House of Representatives expels Dr. Benjamin Church, Jr., and denies him "any of that special Privilege and Protection which every worthy and honest member of this Body is, by the Law and Constitution entitled to."
- November 6** A schooner and a sloop en route from Nova Scotia to Boston with provisions for the garrison there are brought into the port of Plymouth where the goods are confiscated and the prisoners taken are sent to Cambridge.
- November 13** The Massachusetts General Court passes a law authorizing armed vessels and establishing a court for the trial and condemnation of prizes.



Courtesy of Museum of Fine Arts, Boston

Major General Henry Knox

- November 13-14** Arnold's troops reach the Plains of Abraham and call for the surrender of Quebec.
- November 15** Washington authorizes Henry Knox to bring cannon and mortars, captured the previous May at Fort Ticonderoga, to support the siege of Boston.
- November 25** Henry and William Knox arrive in New York City en route to Ticonderoga. While in New York, Henry Knox makes arrangements to send military supplies back to Boston.
- November 27** Captain John Manley sights British ordnance vessels off the Massachusetts coast and captures one, the *Nancy*, which contains a large supply of muskets, flints, and shot. Three other transports and two ships with ordnance stores arrive in Boston.
- November 29** Captain John Manley, commanding the *Lee*, overhauls the British brigantine, the *Nancy*, and takes it into Gloucester. Muskets, shot, powder, and a thirteenth-inch brass mortar are taken. A few days later, Manley captures a 300-ton ship, the *Concord*.
- December 1** Henry and William Knox reach Albany, having traveled from New York City at the rate of forty miles a day.
- December 4** Henry and William Knox reach Fort George below Ticonderoga. There Henry shares a room with a young British prisoner, John Andre, with whom he has a pleasant and friendly conversation. (Five years later Knox served on the court-martial that condemned Andre to be hanged.)
- December 6** Knox supervises the loading of the first pieces of artillery at Ticonderoga on a gondola to be landed at Fort George at the south end of Lake George.
- December 11** Parliament passes a prohibitory bill of Lord North which repeals the Boston Port Bill and the restraining acts of the previous session but forbids commerce with the rebellious colonies.
- December 22** The Continental Congress passes a resolution urging Washington to assault the town of Boston "should he be of the opinion that a successful attack [can] be made on the Troops in Boston . . . notwithstanding the Town and property in it may thereby be destroyed."
- December 24** The Knox caravan arrives at Saratoga.
- December 25** Washington informs the Continental Congress that, with a British armed vessel in Boston harbor threatening bombardment in retaliation for hostile acts, that town has become "an asylum for such as are disaffected to American liberty."
The Knox party reaches New City (Lansingsburg),

about nine miles north of Albany.

Arnold and Montgomery, whose forces were joined on December 2, decide to assault Quebec.

- December 26** The Knox party arrives in Albany after a fatiguing day of travel in deep snow and woods.
In Pittsfield the inhabitants pass a “Remonstrance and Address” to the House of Representatives and the Council declaring that the old charter had become an engine of oppression. They assert, “We chuse to be known to future posterity as being of the Number of those who have timely protested against the Resumption of this discordant Constitution and shall be restless in our endeavours that we may obtain the privilege of electing our Civil and military officers.”
- December 27** Henry Knox bargains in Albany for men, horses, oxen, and sleds to move his artillery. By the end of the month he has located 124 pairs of horses and sleds to add to his caravan.
- December 29** The Massachusetts General Court appoints a committee “to consider and report a plan for fitting out Armed Vessels for the defense of American Liberty.”
- December 30** Washington agrees to allow enlistment of free Negroes in the Continental Army and to recommend approval of the Continental Congress.
- December 31** American troops under Montgomery and Arnold — including many Massachusetts men — attack Quebec unsuccessfully for two days. Montgomery is killed and Arnold is seriously wounded.

1776

- January 1** The Continental flag with thirteen stripes is raised by Washington before his headquarters in Cambridge.
- January 4** In a letter to Samuel Ward, member of the Continental Congress from Rhode Island, General Nathanael Greene writes, “Permit me, then, to recommend from the sincerity of my heart, ready at all times to bleed in my country’s cause, a declaration of independence; and call upon the world, and the great God who governs it, to witness the necessity, propriety and rectitude thereof.”
- January 5** On this date General Philip Schuyler writes to Washington notifying him that the Ticonderoga guns are in

Albany. Knox moves guns southward to Kinderhook and Claverack then eastward into Massachusetts.

January 8 General Putnam sends a small detachment to Charlestown under Major Thomas Knowlton, Jr. to burn the few remaining houses there and capture the guard. Eight houses are burned, one British soldier is killed and five captured.

January 10 Henry Knox and his entourage enter the Berkshires.

January 16 Washington calls Council of War and submits Congress' call for an assault upon Boston for consideration asserting that it would be "indispensably necessary to make a bold attempt to conquer the ministerial troops in Boston before they could be reinforced in the spring."

John Adams and James Warren participate in this Council, and, although it is agreed that the attempt should be made, more troops and support would be needed to carry on the plan. Washington calls for thirteen new regiments for two months' service effective February 1 to carry this out, as well as arms, ammunition, blankets, kettles, and clothing.

January 16-17 Springfield fêtes Henry Knox.

January 19 Undoubtedly inspired by the discussion on the 16th the General Court issues a proclamation on the support of the government and orders it to be read at the opening of every Superior Court of Judicature, at the annual town meetings, and by the ministers of the gospel to their congregations.

General Howe orders that the demolition of houses and wharves for fuel cease.

January 23 The General Court issues a proclamation indicating that that body expects and requires all necessary support and assistance and orders that obedience be given to the magistrates and the courts of justice created in every county. They state that anybody who fails to do this is a disturber of the peace deserving of exemplary punishment.

January 25 John Adams notes in his diary about a trip "to Framingham where we dined. Colonel Buckminster, after dinner, showed us the train of artillery brought down from Ticonderoga by Colonel Knox."

January 27 The Sutton town meeting instructs delegates to the Worcester County Congress to seek redress and to seek to make the Congress permanent.

February 11 Washington and several of his staff, including Knox and Putnam, while on an inspection tour of Roxbury Neck come under British artillery fire.

- February 14** Several hundred British grenadiers and light infantrymen cross over to Dorchester Neck and nearly surprise the American guard there. They burn several houses and capture two American guards.
- February 16** Washington calls Council of War and notes that with the new troops the Americans far outnumber the British in Boston. He asks their opinion regarding a general assault before reinforcements come and while the bay is frozen. They advise against an assault then but agree to a cannonade and bombardment when a sufficient supply of powder becomes available. They agree that preparations for taking possession of Dorchester Hill and Noddle's Island (East Boston) should be made as soon as practicable.
- February 18** The Rev. Thomas Allen of Pittsfield speaks of "designing men" who deceived the Continental Congress into thinking that the people were content with the mere establishment of the General Court.
- February 26** Washington announces that the fortification of Lechmere's Point, with heavy pieces of ordnance, platforms fixed for mortars, and other equipment, is in place.
- March 2** In order to divert British attention American artillery begin firing into Boston from Cobble Hill, Lechmere's Point, and Lamb's Dam, Roxbury. The British return the fire on this and the next night, but no real damage is done.
- March 4** American troops again severely cannonade Boston. At the same time General John Thomas and 2000 troops take possession of the two hills of Dorchester Heights and, working all night, establish their entrenchments and set up their cannon over the town of Boston.
- March 5** British begin bombardment of Dorchester Heights. After two hours the bombardment is discontinued because the British cannot elevate their guns enough to reach the parapets.
- March 6** The American ship *Yankee Hero* brings into Newburyport a British brig of 200 tons burden.
- March 7** General Howe calls his Council and a decision is made to evacuate Boston.
- March 8** "A number of respectable inhabitants" of Boston, "being very anxious for its preservation and safety" are assured by General Howe that "he has no intention of destroying the town, unless the troops under his command are molested during their embarkation," ask Washington for assurances that he would not molest the British. Washington, through an aide, returns the letter



Israel Putnam

since it did not come directly from Howe and was “not obligatory upon General Howe.” (Despite this parrying, Howe left Boston without destroying the town, and Washington did not attack the British upon their embarkation.)

- March 9** Washington plants a battery at the northeast of Bird’s Hill near the water at Dorchester Neck, presumably to annoy British shipping, but an attempt to fortify Nook’s Hill in Dorchester is unsuccessful.
- March 10** Howe issues a proclamation confiscating all linen and woolen goods. The notice states, “If after this notice, any person secretes or keeps in his possession such articles, he will be treated as a favorer of the rebels.” The order also calls for confiscation of all goods which “in the possession of the rebels would enable them to carry on war.”
Horse transports are ordered to fall down to Castle William, cannons are spiked, gun carriages are broken, ammunition is thrown off the wharves. Rather than leave personal belongings behind, many persons destroy furniture, glassware, etc.
- March 11-12** In carrying out Howe’s confiscation order of March 10, Crean Brush, New York Tory who was placed in charge, breaks open stores and homes to confiscate needed goods.
- March 14** Responding to much protest, Howe issues an order forbidding plundering and declaring “that the first soldier who is caught plundering will be hanged on the spot.” Captain Manly reports having sent into Portsmouth an armed British cargo ship of 240 tons and having sent into Cape Ann a ship of 300 tons filled with stores for the army.
- March 13** Washington calls Council of War, and they decide that, if Boston is not evacuated on the following day, they should fortify Nook’s Hill.
- March 16** Washington sends a detachment to fortify Nook’s Hill. The British discover the activity and cannonade the Americans. Although they do not return the fire, the Americans maintain their ground.
- March 17** The British evacuate Boston, taking with them some 1500 Tories, and board ships in Boston harbor. The first detachment of Americans under Putnam and Ward enter the town.
- March 18** Washington orders five regiments of infantry and a part of the artillery under the command of General Heath to march to New York in the expectation that Howe will

- move his forces there.
- March 20** The main body of Washington's army marches into Boston.
- March 21** The British transports leave Boston Harbor and come to anchor at Nantasket Roads.
Washington issues proclamation calling upon inhabitants of Boston to make known to the quartermaster general "all stores belonging to the ministerial army" that are stored in the town, and he orders his officers "to assist the civil magistrates in the execution of their duty, and to promote peace and good order."
- March 25** Because there had been a number of cases of smallpox in various parts of Boston, Washington forbids all officers, soldiers and others from entering Boston without a pass or unless sent on duty.
The Continental Congress receives news of the evacuation of Boston and passes a vote of thanks to Washington and his men and orders that a gold medal be struck in his honor. (Gold medal now in Boston Public Library.)
- March 27** The major portion of the British fleet off Nantasket sails for Halifax. For about two more months several British ships remain off Nantasket. When seven transports of Highland Troops arrived in May, all of the fleet then will leave for Halifax.
A brigade under General John Sullivan begins its march to New York.
- March 29** A joint committee from the Council and the House of Representatives presents a testimonial to Washington closing with "The deliverance of your country being effected, may you, in retirement, enjoy that peace and satisfaction of mind which always attend the good and great; and may future generations, in the peaceable enjoyment of that freedom the exercise of which your sword shall have established, raise the richest and most lasting monuments to the name of Washington."
- April 1** Effective this date, the term "Government and People of the Massachusetts Bay" replaces the King's name in official acts.
- April 4** General Washington leaves Cambridge for New York. General Joseph Spencer and his brigade are ordered to New York.
- April 13** The General Court passes an act ordering that any citizen who receives as pay any bills for a lower sum than that expressed on the notes should be incapable forever of holding any civil or military office in the colony.
- April 16** Samuel Adams writes to James Warren in Boston, "The

To the Selectmen and Citizens of Boston

Gentlemen

Your Congratulations on the Success of the
American Arms, give me the greatest pleasure

I most sincerely rejoice with you, on
your being once more in the quiet possession of your former
habitations, and, what greatly adds to my happiness,
that this desirable Event has been effected with so little
effusion of human blood.

I am exceedingly obliged by the good
opinion you are pleased to entertain of my Conduct. Your
valuable efforts in the Cause of Freedom and the unparalleled
Fortitude with which you have sustained the greatest of
all human Calamities, justly entitle you to the grateful
remembrance of your American Brethren, and I
heartily pray that the hand of Tyranny may never more
disturb your repose, and that every blessing of a kind
Providence may give happiness and prosperity to the
Town of Boston.

George Washington

Courtesy of Massachusetts Historical Society

General George Washington's Letter to the Selectmen of Boston
Following the Evacuation by the British

child Independence is now struggling for birth. I trust that in a short time it will be brought forth and in spite of Pharaoh all America shall hail the dignified stranger."

- April 19** Since a number of people appear to be ready to appropriate property of Tories and other "absconders" "under pretence of gift, sale, or attachment," the House of Representatives votes to appoint a committee to administer the estates. The property is to be inventoried and then leased or administered for the good of the revolutionary cause.
- April 23** The Council concurs in the resolution regarding the administration of Tory estates.
- April 25,26** Essex County convention sends a memorial to the Council and the House of Representatives declaring that the populous, wealthy towns are inadequately represented in the General Court and that representation so far as it deviates from equality approaches the state of slavery.
- April 29** The General Court orders the naval flag of Massachusetts to be a white flag, with a green pine tree, and the inscription, "Appeal to Heaven."
- May 1** The General Court meets in Watertown and passes a Test Law requiring every male over the age of sixteen to subscribe to an oath "before God and the world" that he believes "the war, resistance and opposition in which the United American Colonies are now engaged against the fleets and armies of Great Britain is, on the part of said colonies just and necessary," and promising that he will not assist the British forces in any way. The General Court also resolves that all political authority is to be performed in the name of "The Government and the People of the Massachusetts Bay in New England."
- May 4** The General Court adopts an act providing a more equal representation in the General Court which will allow the larger towns to have more representatives.
- May 9** The House of Representatives establishes a committee to study the matter of independence from Great Britain "to bring in a Resolve recommending the several Towns in the Colony to give Instructions to their Representatives, with respects to INDEPENDENCE." The resolve is prepared asking that each town instruct its representatives as to "what conduct they would have them observe with regard to the next General Assembly's instructing the Delegates of this colony on that subject." The resolve is passed and sent to the Council for concurrence.

- May 10** The Council refuses to concur in the resolution of May 9, and the House passes a resolve that requests the people of each town to advise their representatives whether, if Congress declares the colonies independent, they “will solemnly engage with their Lives and Fortunes to Support the Congress in the Measure,” and they order that the resolve be published in several newspapers “as soon as possible.”
- May 17** Captain James Mugford of the schooner *Franklin* captures the British transport ship *Hope*, bound for Boston, without opposition. He cannot bring his prize into Boston for the *Hope* runs ashore at Pulling Point. The cargo, consisting of much valuable military stores including 1500 barrels of powder, is brought to Boston in a number of small boats.
- May 19** Captain Mugford in the *Franklin* and a small privateer, the *Lady Washington*, are attacked by a number of British ships off Point Shirley. Although they beat them off and sink two of the British ships, Captain Mugford is mortally wounded.
- May 29** The town of Pittsfield, under the leadership of the Reverend Thomas Allen, sends a memorial to the General Court stating that the charter of 1691 and other agreements are dissolved by the war and asking the General Court to frame “a fundamental constitution as the basis and framework of legislation and refer it to the people for their approbation.”
- The General Court reassembles at Watertown.
- May 30** The Boston town meeting discusses independence, and Samuel Adams declares that loyalty to King George III “is now Treason to our Country,” and he reiterates that he looks forward to the time that the Continental Congress “Shall dictate the Necessity of Making a Declaration of Independence.” They also instruct their representatives to work for a separation of powers in the proposed constitutions and so that persons in executive positions should have salaries large enough to “place them above the necessity of stooping to any indirect or collateral means for subsistence.”
- June 3** A town meeting in Taunton concludes that, if the Continental Congress should pass a Declaration of Independence, the people of that town “with their lives and fortunes do solemnly engage to support them in the same.”
- June 4** The General Court votes to fortify Nantasket, Hough’s Neck, and several of the islands in Boston harbor in

order to keep out enemy vessels.

- June 5** The Boston selectmen provide for a town watch of five men for each of three ships to guard against any subversive activity in the town.
- June 6** The General Court asks representatives from the towns about local attitudes toward independence. Some reports that their towns are unanimously in favor of independence, and others inform the body that their towns have taken no action and have given them no instructions in the matter.
- June 7** The committee named on May 9 asks those towns which have not yet instructed their representatives concerning their attitude toward independence to do so immediately.
- June 11** General Benjamin Lincoln is authorized by the Council to call out the militia to drive the remaining British fleet to sea.
- June 12** In Philadelphia John Adams is appointed by the Continental Congress to a committee "to prepare a plan of treaties to be proposed to foreign powers."
- June 13** General Lincoln, using Continental troops and a number of militia from the towns, prepares to drive the fleet from the harbor. Massachusetts regiments under Colonels Marshall and Whiting leave Boston for picket duty on Peddocks' Island and in Hull.
- June 14** American troops at Long Island open fire on the British fleet. Commodore Banks returns the fire. The American fire pierces the upper works of his ship. Blowing up the lighthouse first, Banks signals the fleet to get underway and Boston harbor is finally cleared of enemy ships. As part of the harbor defense, cannon are set in place in Nantasket. In Topsfield the instructions to their representatives indicate that they want independence declared and the old charter adhered to until all of the people vote for a change.
- June 17** The *Boston Gazette* publishes a notice of the capture of five English transports carrying Highlanders and marines by Massachusetts privateers.
- July 3** The House of Representatives votes unanimously "That if the Honorable Continental Congress should think proper to declare the Colonies independent of the kingdom of Great Britain, this House will approve of the measure."
The General Court also agrees to draft 5,000 men for the Continental Army to serve in New York and Canada.
- July 6** John Hancock, President of the Continental Congress, sends a copy of the broadside of the Declaration of

Independence to the "Honble Assembly of Massachusetts Bay," and he addresses a letter to that body explaining the meaning and importance of the Declaration.

- July 15** The broadside containing the Declaration of Independence reaches Boston. The House of Representatives having prorogued two days earlier, the Council receives the Declaration and names a committee to consider "what way, manner & form the Declaration should be made Publick."
- General Artemas Ward reads the Declaration of Independence to the regiments in Boston.
- July 16** The Declaration of Independence is printed in the *Salem American Gazette* on this day and in the *Massachusetts Spy* (Worcester) on the next day.
- On July 18 the *Continental Journal* and the *New England Chronicle* publish the Declaration, and on July 22 it appears in the *Boston Gazette*.
- July 17** The Council committee reports that the Sheriff of Suffolk County will read the Declaration of Independence from the balcony of the State House the next afternoon at one o'clock.
- July 18** The Declaration of Independence is read from the balcony of the State House to a large crowd. Cannon are fired, bells are rung, and there is general exultation in the towns as the king's arms are taken down.
- August 8** General Ward announces that he plans to retire as soon as a replacement is obtained.
- August 14** Boston patriots meet and erect a pole on the stump of the Liberty Tree, and they hoist a red flag of defiance.
- August 16** Thomas Fletcher reports to the Massachusetts Council that he has been unable to recruit any Penobscot Indians in Maine for Washington's army, for their leaders believe that their young men might be needed to defend themselves against the British.
- August 21** The Massachusetts Council orders local Committees of Correspondence, Inspections, and Safety to "take effectual care to keep within the limits of their respective towns and plantations, all prisoners of war who are under their care." In cases of misbehavior, they assert that prisoners should be confined to the county jails.
- August 22** General Ward orders Captain Burbank and his artillery company to march as soon as possible to Norwich and then to go by water to New York.
- August 29** The Massachusetts Council expresses its approbation of the Declaration of Independence "and readiness to

risque our lives and fortunes in defence and support of it."

- August 31** The General Court passes a resolution to send to New Hampshire a ship to be "fixed out for the purpose of attacking the *Milford* or other ships distressing our coast."
- September 4** The House of Representatives informs the Council that they "are desirous of expressing, with a manly fortitude, their entire satisfaction in the *Declaration of Independence*, made by the Honorable Congress, and published, with your Honours order, in this State."
- September 10** The Continental Congress calls for additional troops and the General Court orders every fifth man to march to the neighborhood of New York.
- September 14** Two negroes captured on the high seas having been advertised for sale in Salem, the General Court passes a resolution forbidding their sale and calls for them to be treated as prisoners of war.
- September 16** The General Court orders a committee to erect or purchase a furnace for casting large cannons. They vote that since Preserved Clap has claimed that he has discovered a superior method for boring cannons, he should try to convince the committee of its usefulness. He would then be compensated accordingly.
The Continental Congress sets a quota of fifteen battalions from Massachusetts for service.
- September 17** The General Court passes a resolution stating that they would draw up a constitution which would then be "made public for the inspection and perusal of the Inhabitants, before the Ratification thereof by the Assembly." The resolution is then sent to the towns for their reaction.
- September 19** The General Court asked the towns to empower their representatives to form a constitution, but the opposition of several towns, particularly Boston and Worcester, precludes that body from taking action.
- September 22** Massachusetts troops under Lieutenant Colonel Michael Jackson make an unsuccessful raid on Maontresor's Island.
- September-October** The Massachusetts towns respond to the request that they consider the preparation of a constitution by the General Court. Some towns reserve the right of the people to approve, some want a convention to write the constitution indicating that loyalty and obedience would remain tenuous until the citizens were involved in the making of the constitution. Fewer than one-half of the

towns vote on the resolution and among the towns that object are Boston, Worcester, Rehoboth, Norton, Concord, Milton, Ashby, and Dorchester.

- October 1** Glover's brigade fighting at Pell's Point, N.Y., repulse the British light infantry twice.
- October 10** In Boston a special town meeting considers the legislative proposal of September 17 and rejects it. They call for involvement of all of the people in framing the constitution, adding that people "have a higher Privilege than a bare inspection and perusal of the constitution under which they are to live."
- October 18** Four Massachusetts regiments including one commanded by John Glover fight with British at Pell's Point, N.Y., twice repulsing them.
- October 22** The voters of Concord assert that the members of the General Court "are by no means a Body proper to form and establish a Constitution or form of Government" and ask that a special convention be chosen to draw up a constitution and submit it to the people.
- October 26** The General Court appoints a Board of War consisting of nine men "empowered to Order and Direct the operations of the Force in the Pay of this State, both by sea and land."
- October 28** Massachusetts troops take part in battle of White Plains, N.Y.
- November 26** The Worcester County towns issue a resolution concerning the proposal of September 17 in which they assert that the General Court having "unequal unsafe representation is not the best body to form a government." They believe that a state congress for the sole purpose of forming a constitution is preferable and that any proposed constitution should be approved by the people.
- December 10** The House of Representatives declares that when the General Court is in recess its whole power devolves on the Council.
- December 25** Glover's Marbleheaders row Washington and his troops across the Delaware.
- December 26** Eight Massachusetts regiments take part in Washington's successful attack on Trenton, N.J.
- December 30** Washington exhorts Massachusetts troops to stay beyond the date when enlistments expire, and many agree to do so.

- January 3** Since several privateers have captured British ships carrying sugar, the General Court grants permission for the exportation of twelve hogsheads of sugar for every hundred tons of each vessel registered.
- January 4** Governor Trumbull of Connecticut sends a messenger to Boston with news of Washington's crossing of the Delaware and his victory at Trenton.
- January 5** The General Court considers price fixing legislation particularly regarding foodstuffs sold in the commonwealth.
- January 9** The General Court makes an agreement with Samuel Phillips, Jr., of Andover for the erection of a mill and the manufacture of powder for Massachusetts.
- January 12** Letters from field officers in New Jersey and Pennsylvania about the Delaware crossing and the battles of Trenton and Princeton are made public in Boston.
- January 16** The *Independent Chronicle* prints Thomas Paine's *The American Crisis*, and men are stirred by the statements that "these are the times that try men's souls: the summer soldier and the sunshine patriot will, in this crisis shrink from the service of his country. . . ."
- January 20** The House of Representatives proposes to levy 5,000 blankets from the towns for the army.
The town of Sutton, unhappy about the representation passed on May 4, 1776, votes to choose delegates for a Worcester County Congress to seek redress and sends an invitation to other towns to do the same.
Massachusetts joins the Continental Congress in issuing a joint statement encouraging enlistments in the Continental army.
- January 25** The General Court passes price control laws setting maximum prices for "well-fatted grass-fed beef," "stall-fed beef well-fatted," salt, and other items.
- January 26** The General Court calls for more enlistments in the Continental Army and by midyear a resolve is passed that every seventh man should serve.
- February 1** Although an overwhelming majority of the citizens of Berkshire County have voted to resist any courts until a constitution exists, the General Court orders the judges of the Court of Sessions to hold court there.

- February 9** The Massachusetts Council orders the troops raised in Hampshire and Berkshire Counties to join the Continental Army in service at Ticonderoga.
- February 11** The General Court defines treason in Massachusetts in terms of allegiance to its authority.
- March 6** The Massachusetts Council, acting on a proposal by John Hancock, resolves that the Declaration of Independence should be entered upon their records and made part of the state archives. On the next day the House of Representatives concurs in the action.
- March 22** The General Court passes the first of a series of resolutions (April 30, May 10, June 4, 1777) offering, in addition to the Congressional bounty, the sum of twenty pounds, to be paid in two equal installments, plus additional benefits to each man who enlists.
- April 4** In the House of Representatives a resolution "to empower the General Court to frame a Constitution" is passed and that body recommends that "the several towns and places in this state . . . send members to the General Assembly to represent them as they make a choice of men to form a Constitution of Government." It is voted that the constitution when formed will need the approval of two-thirds of the people at town meetings.
- May 5** The General Court submits a request to the towns for the second time, asking that they instruct their representatives to the next General Court to form with the Council a constitutional convention. Several of the towns refuse to grant this request.
- May 26** The Boston town meeting instructs the representatives to oppose the General Court's plan to form a constitution and indicates that it wishes to have a special convention called for that purpose.
- June 3** Concerned that the British fleet and troops in Newport might launch an attack on Boston, the General Court orders the forts in the harbor to be repaired and manned and the militia nearby be "put upon the most respectable footing."
- June 9** A bill is reported in the House of Representatives "for preventing the practice of holding persons in slavery."
- June 19** The General Court resolves itself into a Constitutional Convention and appoints a committee to draft a constitution. The convention is in session until March 6, 1778.
- July** Two additional state regiments are ordered raised for service in New England.

- July 2** The General Court resolves to send additional troops to reinforce General Gates in upstate New York.
- July 4** On the first anniversary of the signing of the Declaration of Independence a great military parade is held in Boston. The Rev. William Gordon preaches before the representatives, councillors, and the other public officials. A formal dinner is held, toasts are drunk, and the evening closes with a great fireworks display.
- August 8** The General Court agrees to send additional Massachusetts troops to join the American forces in upstate New York.
- August 16** Massachusetts troops take part in the defeat of Colonel Baum by John Stark and some 2,000 militia near Bennington.
- October 3** The Continental Congress recommends that the states raise \$5 million by taxes and apportions to Massachusetts \$820,000, the largest amount to a single state.
- October 22** The General Court votes to assess a tax of £305,642,14s 3d upon the towns and a tax of £8883,7s, 3d to pay the representatives for attendance at and travel to the General Court in 1776.
- November 6** Burgoyne's troops arrive in Boston. British troops are barracked on Prospect Hill, German troops on Winter Hill, and the officers are quartered in Cambridge and other nearby towns.
- November 8** Congress instructs General Heath to require descriptive lists of all troops surrendered at Saratoga to be sure that they would not appear in arms against the Americans for the duration of the war.
- November 20** The General Court authorizes raising two regiments to serve one year in Rhode Island or any of the other New England states and calls for militia service in defense of the sea coast.
- November 17** The Continental Congress orders that the Articles of Confederation be submitted to the States for ratification.
- November 21** John Adams is named to replace Silas Deane in the mission to France. He accepts and late that winter sails for Europe, arriving in Paris on April 8, 1778.
- December 4** The General Court receives souvenirs of the Bennington battle from Colonel John Stark. These include a brass drum, a firearm and bayonet, a grenadier's cap, and a Hessian gun, all of which are placed on permanent exhibit.
- December 11** The committee to prepare a draft of the Massachusetts constitution makes its initial report.

1778

- January 17** House and Council organizes as a Constitutional Convention to consider the report of the committee named to prepare constitutions.
- February 3** General Heath is instructed that the embarkation of Burgoyne's troops is to be postponed indefinitely; the transports upon their arrival are to be ordered away from the port of Boston, and the guard over the prisoners is to be strengthened. In the spring when Burgoyne and his staff are allowed to return to England, the British troops are removed inland to Rutland, Mass. and in the fall are sent to Charlottesville, Virginia. (They were not returned to England until after the war.)
- February 13** John Adams and his ten-year-old son, John Quincy, sail for France, where the elder Adams succeeds Silas Deane as a commissioner to that country. While in France they reside with Benjamin Franklin.
- February 28** The Constitutional Convention approves the draft of the Constitution presented to them in January. It is then submitted to the people of the state for ratification, a two-thirds vote being needed for adoption. (It was defeated by a total vote of 9,972 to 2,083, largely as a result of the influence of the *Essex Result*. See entry for April 29, 1778.)
The General Court names a committee of two, Daniel Hopkins and Samuel Phillips Jr., to consult with Washington "relative to the expediency of raising more than the quota of troops required of the state, and to consult as to the time for which the men should be engaged."
- March 4 through July** The constitution is submitted to the people for ratification, a two-thirds vote of approval being needed for adoption. The towns make their returns and the constitution is rejected 9,972 to 2,083, largely as a result of the *Essex Result*. (See entry for April 29, 1778.)
- March 10** The General Court approves the Articles of Confederation stating that "no plan could have been proposed better adapted to the circumstances of all."
- April 29** A convention of delegates from the towns of Essex County assembles at Treadwell's Tavern in Ipswich and adjourn on May 12. They adopt a pamphlet called the *Essex Result*, written by a Newburyport lawyer,

Theophilus Parsons, which attacks the prepared Massachusetts Constitution and presents some “true principles of government,” objectives that a good constitution should meet. The pamphlet outlines the need for an independent legislature of two branches, a strong executive, and an uncontrolled court. The separation of powers among its three branches of government is stressed as is the need for a bill of rights.

- May** Despite the fact that the General Court ordered the justices of the peace to hold Quarter Sessions courts, the town of Pittsfield votes not to permit the courts to open.
- May 1** The House of Representatives votes to furnish free a full suit of clothes for every soldier from Massachusetts who joins the Continental Army and to give a sum of money to all officers then in the service who engage to continue.
- May 11** The town of Hardwick passes a number of resolutions, the sixth of which is significant. They assert “that whereas a number of Negroes that are now slaves have from time to time Humbly Petitioned to the General Court for their Liberty and Freedom, and as yet have not attained it but are still held in Slavery, which is very contrary to the Law of God and Liberty. . . .”
- May 20** The Lenox town meeting responds to the proposed constitution by stating that there ought to be a bill of rights, that some men who have fought may be disenfranchised, and that “Money ought not to be made a necessary qualification of a Senator or Representative; which countenances avarice and rejects Merit.”
- May 25** About 150 British soldiers from Newport under the command of one Major Ayres cross Mt. Hope Bay and land at Fall River. The town guard sounds the alarm and the local militia turns out. The British fire at them and the Americans retreat a short distance and then return the fire. One British soldier is killed and one is mortally wounded. The British burn a house, a grist mill, and a saw mill before retreating, taking an aged man as prisoner whom they later release.
- June 19** The House of Representatives passes a bill to raise £120,000 from the towns in taxes in addition to £254,718 voted earlier in the session.
- August 7** In response to British incursions from Newport into the Southern part of the state some 2,000 men are ordered on to expel the British from Rhode Island.
- August 9** American troops, including a number of Massachusetts

militia under General John Hancock, take part in siege of Newport.

- August 28** The Marquis de Lafayette rides to Boston this evening from Newport and arrives at about the same time that the French fleet under D'Estaing is entering Boston Harbor. He stays for two days and tries unsuccessfully to induce D'Estaing to attack the British in Rhode Island. D'Estaing does agree to send several battalions to aid the Americans in Rhode Island but the retreat ordered by General Sullivan makes this plan unfeasible.
- August 29** British troops in Rhode Island attack besieging Americans, including many from Massachusetts, but they are repulsed.
- August 30** General John Sullivan in Rhode Island is notified that reinforcements for British there are on their way. A council of war is called and an orderly and skillful retreat is undertaken.
- August 30** Major General Gray sails from Newport with several British transports to the Acushnet River. Here he lands in the evening and in twenty-four hours destroys seventy vessels. New Bedford, Fairhaven, and Martha's Vineyard are also attacked. Six armed vessels of from fourteen to sixteen guns, warehouses, and public stores are destroyed, and ten thousand sheep and three hundred oxen are taken.
- September 1** Admiral Howe and his ships are outside Boston Harbor. They are unable to entice D'Estaing to come out and fight, so Howe returns to New York.
- September 5** British ships and troops from New London attack Bedford Village (New Bedford) setting fire to several buildings, including a distillery and two ropewalks. Several vessels are burned, grounded, or sunk, and a number of inhabitants are killed. The British also destroy property in Acushnet Village and Fairhaven. They camp nearby on the next day and then leave on September 7, taking sixteen prisoners. On the sixth several barges with soldiers go to Padanarum where they burn several houses and move on to Falmouth and Martha's Vineyard. In both of these places American shipping is destroyed, and money, stock, and other property are carried away.
- September 7** A riot occurs in Boston involving French troops and some disorderly French bakers. In the melee the Chevalier de Saint Sauveur is injured, and he dies on September 15. (On the next day the House of Representatives orders a monument to be erected in his memory but this is not actively accomplished until May 24, 1917.)

- September 27** General Lafayette is again in Boston for a few days.
- October 16** The General Court passes an act naming the most notorious of the Tories and providing for their arrest and imprisonment if they ever entered the state. For the second offense the penalty prescribed is death. The list begins with Thomas Hutchinson, Francis Bernard, Thomas Oliver, and Timothy Ruggles, and then contains the names of several hundred persons from every county in Massachusetts and the district of Maine.
- November 1** Admiral Byron appears off Boston Harbor with a large naval force but is driven off by a severe storm which disables his fleet. He is compelled to go to Newport to refit.
- November 3** Count D'Estaing sails from Boston for the West Indies. A British squadron appears off Cape Cod, and in Boston officials believe that a general engagement and perhaps an attack on Boston are planned. Nine regiments of militia are ordered into Boston. Admiral Howe decides not to attack, and the troops are discharged.
- November 6** General Horatio Gates is appointed to supersede General William Heath in command of the forces stationed in Massachusetts. He spends the winter of 1778-79 in Boston and Providence.
- December 11** General Lafayette, who has been seriously ill, arrives in Boston en route to France. He is publicly honored and cared for by a sympathetic citizenry, and when he leaves a month later he asserts that his health has been restored by the Madeira wine provided by grateful Bostonians.

1779

- January** The Continental Congress calls upon the states to raise \$15 million to liquidate outstanding claims and for the immediate expenses of the war. Of this amount, \$2 million is apportioned to Massachusetts.
- January 11** General Lafayette sails from Boston for France aboard the U. S. frigate *Alliance*.
- January 12** A committee of the General Court reports "that a bill ought to be brought in for suppressing theatrical entertainment, horse racing, gaming, and such diversions as are productive of idleness, dissipation, and a general

depravity of manners, agreeable to a resolve of Congress of October 12, 1778, recommending the same." A committee is named for that purpose, and they report a bill on February 10. It is read a second time on the following day and recommitted on February 12.

February 15 General Gates having asked that the militia should be called out to assist in fortifying the harbor and to collect stores and provisions, the General Court addresses a memorial to the Continental Congress asking for their advice on the subject and whether the Continental Army would be available if Massachusetts were invaded.

February 19 The House of Representatives resolves that the selectmen of each town should call a town meeting on or before May 26, 1779 to determine two questions, "Whether they choose at this time, to have a new Constitution or form of Government made, and, if this should be approved, whether "they will empower their Representatives for the next year to vote for the calling a State Convention, for the sole purpose of forming a new Constitution."

February 20 The Massachusetts Council concurs in the House resolve of February 19, 1779.

February 26 The Massachusetts Train of Artillery is reduced from seven to three companies, and Lieutenant Paul Revere is given the command of the unit.

The General Court passes an act pardoning all "riots, revolts, and unlawful assemblies" that had taken place between April 10, 1774 and February 1, 1779.

February 27 General Gates informs the General Court of "the necessity of raising men to guard the stores at Springfield." His letter is read and it was "ordered that Mr. Gorham bring in a resolve empowering the Council to make the necessary provisions and order for raising a guard." The General Court passes a bill calling "for apportioning and assessing a tax of £1,104,422, 7s, 8d, upon the several towns and other places in this state . . . ; and also for assessing a further tax of £12,383, 16s, 9d paid for the members of the House of Representatives for their travel and attendance in the General Court for the year 1778."

April 9 The General Court votes to station militia in the sea-coast towns likely to be attacked by enemy ships and in Falmouth on Cape Cod which had been attacked by British ships.

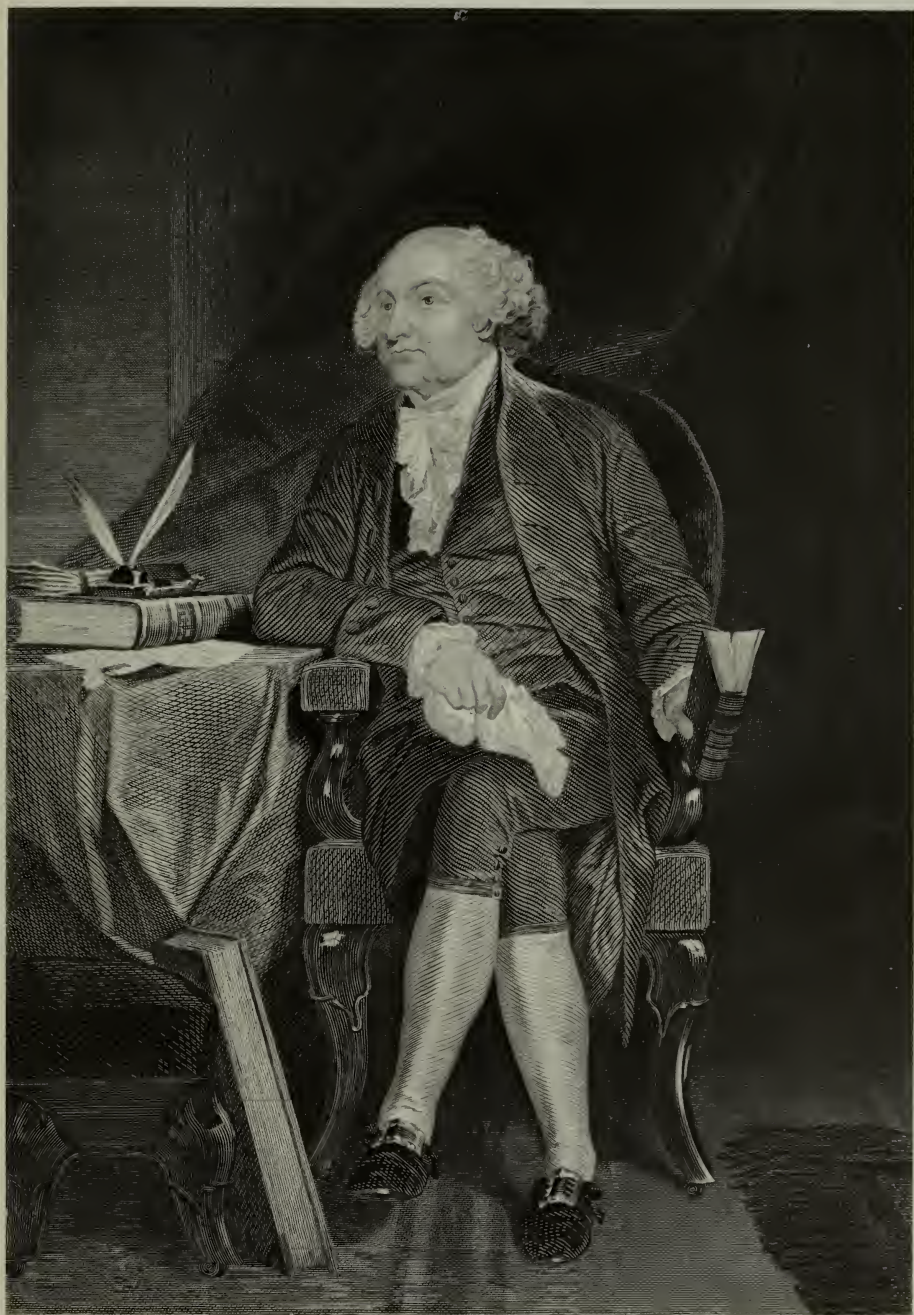
April 16 The General Court passes a bill "for the increase and

encouragement of the marine of this state, and for raising the sum of £50,000 pounds for this purpose.”

- April 17** After several weeks of discussions and preliminary votes, the General Court agrees to raise 2,000 men, if necessary, in addition to those already on duty in Rhode Island and in Massachusetts.
- April 20** The General Court passes an act “for encouraging the fitting out of armed vessels to defend the sea coast of America, and for erecting a court to try and condemn all vessels that should be found infesting the same.”
- May 1** The General Court takes final action regarding “The estates of certain persons commonly called absenters.” From this day on the property of Loyalists in Massachusetts was to “escheat, enure, and accure to the sole use and benefit of the government and people of this state.”
- May 4** The Supreme Court attempts to sit at Great Barrington, but the judges find a mob of 300 people in possession of the courthouse. A group of Constitutionlists explain that they are opposed to any operation of law until a constitution is adopted. In deference to their wishes, the judges do not open the court and report their information to the Council.
- June 17** British troops under Brigadier General McLein land at Penobscot (Castine), Maine to establish a post to annoy the commerce of the United States, and within a week the news is received in Boston.
- June 17** A majority of the towns taking action on the House resolve of February 19, 1779, having reported in the affirmative, the General Court directs “the Selectmen of the several Towns and Places” to call town meetings at which “every Freeman Inhabitant of such town, who is twenty-one years of age, shall have a right to vote” to elect delegates to a constitutional convention to be held in Cambridge on September 1.
- June 25** The General Court orders the raising of a force of 1000 men under Brigadier General Lovell to attack the British at Penobscot. Lieutenant Paul Revere is placed in charge of ordnance.
- Summer** 800 militia are called out in June for six months for the defense of Rhode Island. A regiment of light infantry is raised for a year’s service in Massachusetts or the New England states. Military stores are transferred from Boston to Springfield to be deposited at the arsenal recently established there. In addition, of the 2,000 troops raised by vote on April 17, 500 are sent to Rhode Island and 1,500 are enlisted for nine months of service by

an appeal to the towns to offer up a bounty.

- June** An expedition to the Penobscot area to drive the British from their fort at Castine wins the support of the Continental Congress and the Massachusetts General Court. With the support of many prominent merchants who agree to charter their vessels, the General Court agrees to raise 1,500 men in addition to the marines already employed. Only about 900 actually serve. Nineteen armed vessels and twenty-three transports with 344 guns all under the command of Richard Saltonstall of Connecticut set out on this expedition.
- July 1** The Massachusetts Council orders the Board of War to provide transports for the troops for the Penobscot expedition.
- July 19** A fleet of nineteen armed vessels and twenty-one transports sets out for Penobscot. Dudley Saltonstall is commodore of the fleet.
- July 20** The armada to be used in the attack on Castine sets out.
- July 25** The Penobscot expedition fleet appears before Fort Castine.
The Massachusetts fleet and troops are off Penobscot.
- July 26** The American militia and some marines land at Penobscot under cover of the Massachusetts fleet and lay siege to the British fort there.
- July 28** The American troops begin their attack upon the British at Castine. After severe punishment they manage to scale the heights before the fort. In the engagement that follows the Americans lose 100 and the enemy, 30. Without naval support, they are forced to besiege the fort.
- August 2** John Adams arrives in Boston on the ship *Sensible*. The French minister to the United States, Conrad Girard, accompanies him.
- August 3** A British fleet sails from New York to relieve the British garrison at Penobscot.
- August 8** The Massachusetts Board of War sends supplies and 500 gallons of rum for the fleet and troops at Penobscot, and they order General Lovell to make an immediate attack on the fort and to retreat immediately.
- August 13** The British at Penobscot are reinforced by a fleet of seven ships. The Americans, feeling that they can not compete with the new opposition, abandon the siege and retreat. In Massachusetts the whole affair was considered a disaster.
- August 14** The British fleet arrives off the Penobscot River.
- September 1** The Constitutional Convention of 293 certified delegates



John Adams



Mastmakers

Banners carried by Boston tradesmen in parade honoring George Washington on his first visit to Boston following his election as President of the United States of America in 1789.

Courtesy of Bostonian Society



Cordwainers (Shoemakers)

assembles at the Meeting House of the First Church in Cambridge. James Bowdoin is elected president of the convention and Samuel Barrett is named secretary.

- September 3** A committee of thirty-one, four at large and twenty-seven named by the county delegations, is chosen to draft "a Declaration of Rights and the Form of a Constitution."
- September 7** The Constitutional Convention adjourns until late October.
- September-October** The committee of thirty-one named to prepare a draft of a constitution meets and delegates its work to a committee consisting of James Bowdoin, Samuel Adams, and John Adams. They meet, and the major part of the work is accomplished by John Adams, who has been absent in Europe from February 1778 to August 1779 and is at home for four months before returning overseas.
- October 28** The Constitutional Convention reconvenes and considers the draft of the proposed constitution focusing most of its attention to the Declaration of Rights. There are now 312 certified delegates.
- November 7** After several days of debate the Constitutional Convention names a committee of seven, including Theophilus Parsons, Robert Treat Paine, Samuel Adams, Caleb Strong, Timothy Danielson, David Sanford, and Noah Alden, to consider the proposed Declaration of Rights.
- November 10** The committee considering the proposed Declaration of Rights reports a new draft and presents a report modifying some of the original statement, and the report is accepted with only minor changes.
- November 11** The attendance at the Constitutional Convention falls to about one hundred, and so the Convention is adjourned to January 5, 1780.
- November 13** John Adams and his sons John Quincy and Charles sail from Boston aboard the *Sensible* for Spain. They arrive at El Ferrol on December 8, 1779, and proceed overland to Paris, arriving there on February 5, 1780.
- December 29** Because of local agitation the Superior Court session for Berkshire County is discontinued.

- January 5** The Constitutional Convention meets, but so few are present that the meeting is adjourned.
- January 27** Sixty delegates are present at the Constitutional Convention and forty-two vote that the body should proceed to business. Forty-seven towns are represented, thirty-three from Suffolk, Essex, and Middlesex counties. There are no delegates present from Maine or from Plymouth, Barnstable, Nantucket and Dukes Counties.
- March 2** A committee of five named by the Constitutional Convention recommends submission of the constitution to the people of the Commonwealth. The convention agrees that 1800 copies of the Constitution should be printed and sent to the selectmen of the towns and local committee, "to be laid before the inhabitants thereof." They further agree "if the major part of said inhabitants disapprove of any particular part of the same, that they be desired to state their objectives distinctively and the reasons therefor." The votes of each town should be sent to the convention for tabulation "in order that the said convention, at the adjournment, may collect the general sense of their constituents on the several parts of the proposed Constitution. And if there doth not appear to be two-thirds of their constituents in favour thereof, the convention may alter it in such manner as that it may be agreeable to the sentiments of two-thirds of the votes throughout the state."
- March 26** The French frigate *Hermione* carrying General Lafayette enters Boston harbor and is saluted by the guns on Castle Island and Fort Hill.
- March 28** Lafayette disembarks at Hancock's Wharf where a procession of leading citizens greets him and escorts him to John Hancock's home. He addresses the General Court, is given a grand reception, and fireworks are displayed in his honor.
- March 29** Lafayette entertains the leading civil and military authorities at a dinner aboard the *Hermione*. At the dinner thirteen toasts are drunk, each followed by a military salute. The toast drunk to Washington receives seventeen guns, "the number given to a Marshal of France."

- May** The General Court calls in all Continental money and issues £460,000 "new emission money," payable in specie December 31, 1786, and bearing 5% interest annually. The new money is to be legal tender and is proportioned one to one with specie and forty to one with Continental Bills of Credit.
- May 4** The Academy of Arts and Sciences is incorporated in Boston. James Bowdoin is named first president and Joseph Willard of Cambridge, president of Harvard College, is chosen vice-president and corresponding secretary.
- May 12** The voters of Boston agree to accept the Constitution but propose several modifications in the bill of rights.
- June 7** The Constitutional Convention reassembles in the Brattle Street Church in Boston. Twenty-seven new delegates join the convention. A committee of five is appointed "to revise and arrange" the returns from the towns.
- June 12** The committee on returns reports to the Constitutional Convention on the votes from each town. They record a two-thirds vote of approval for each article.
- June 15** The Constitutional Convention receives the detailed report on the returns from the towns and accepts each article by a "very great majority." A motion "that the People of the State of Massachusetts Bay have accepted the Constitution in its printed form, submitted to their revision by the Resolves of 2d March last" is "passed in the affirmative by a very great majority."
- June 16** James Bowdoin, President of the Constitutional Convention, signs a proclamation announcing the acceptance of the new constitution by more than two thirds of those voting and declares that the constitution will go into effect at the meeting of the General Court on October 25, 1780.
- July 25** General Rochambeau, many of whose sailors and soldiers are ill, asks Massachusetts for militia promising that they "will be nourished like our own troops, we will reward them for their work, and . . . send them back again, against the harvest time. . . ."
- September 4** The election of the governor, lieutenant governor, and state senators takes place.
- October 9** By this date all of the towns have completed their elections of state representatives.
- October 25** On this day, "the first day of General Election under the new Constitution," the "Committee of both Houses appointed to examine the Returns from the several Towns

within this State of their Choice of a Governor” reports that John Hancock is chosen Governor “by a Majority of the Votes returned.” Hancock is sworn in by Thomas Cushing, President of the Senate, and the secretary and Suffolk County sheriff proclaim his election and inauguration from the balcony of the State House. No person has a majority of votes for lieutenant governor, so the General Court chooses James Bowdoin, but he declines as does James Warren, who is next chosen. Thomas Cushing is then elected, and he accepts the post.

December Before adjourning, the General Court appoints a special committee “to revise the laws in use in the commonwealth and to select, abridge, alter, and digest them, so as they should be accommodated to the present government.” This special commission is also requested to prepare bills for the due observance of the Sabbath and for the prevention of the vices of drunkenness and profanity.

December 13 General Rochambeau comes to Boston for three days. He visits the Castle, Bunker Hill, the lines around Boston, General Washington’s former headquarters in Cambridge, and Harvard University. He and Major General Choisy, who accompanied him, stay at Governor Hancock’s home.

1781

January The Massachusetts Medical Society is organized. The General Court repeals the tender provisions of the money act passed the previous May and leaves it to the Supreme Court to determine the real value of the paper money.

January 2 The Massachusetts Council asks the Naval Board “To order the Commissary of Prisoners to remove the prisoners from Noodle’s [sic!] Island, on board the prison ship in the harbor of Boston, and all marine prisoners that are at large in the towns of Boston, and confine them in the hold of Said Ship and treat them in a similar manner as the American prisoners are treated on the Prison Ship of New York, until a different conduct is observed by the enemy.”

- February-March** Several towns in the Connecticut Valley and the Worcester area meet in convention in Sutton, in Hatfield, and in Greenfield to oppose the repeal of the emissions act.
- February 22** The Continental Congress votes the sum of \$2,000,000 to reimburse Massachusetts in part for the Penobscot expedition of 1779.
- March 12** General Rochambeau thanks Hancock for complying so completely with his request for militia the previous summer (see entry for July 25, 1780).
- March 15** The *Continental Journal* carries the advertisement, "To be SOLD, an extraordinary likely Negro wench, 17 years old, she can be warranted to be strong, healthy, and good natured, has no sense of Freedom, has been always used to a Farmer's Kitchen, and dairy, and is not known to have any failing, but being with child, which is the only cause of her being sold."
- May 8** The French frigate *Concorde* arrives in Boston from Brest. Among the passengers are Comte de Barras, who is to assume command of the French fleet, and Viscomte de Rochambeau, son and aide-de-camp of the illustrious French commander then at Newport.
- May 26** The Congress passes an act establishing a national bank, the "Bank of North America." The Massachusetts representatives vote unanimously against the incorporation of the bank.
- June** The House of Representatives reconsiders its repeal of the emissions act and votes 76 to 47 to reinstate new emissions money as legal tender. The Senate fails to take any action on the measure.
- June 7** General Rochambeau asks Governor Hancock for five hundred militia "for the security of the French squadron in Newport."
- July** The General Court, following the advice of Congress, declares that the new emission money is no longer legal tender at any value. Although a creditor need no longer accept it in payment for debts in courts of law, the new emission money is still receivable for taxes.
- October** A bill is introduced in the House of Representatives to give the judges of the Supreme Court and Court of Commons pleas the power to suspend making up judgments against debtors until times improve and more money circulates. Although strongly supported by the western towns, the bill fails at the second reading.
- November** The General Court lays excise taxes on wines and liquors, teas, coaches, chaises, and carriages, the income to be used to pay the interest on state securities. There is

- widespread grumbling and hostility.
- December 23** General Lafayette returns to France, again sailing from Boston on the U.S. frigate *Alliance*, which had carried him home almost three years earlier.
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1782

- January 7** The General Court passes a law giving currency to the bills within the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, instructing the treasurers and other officers to receive them for payment of public debts, and subjecting to severe punishment those who should counterfeit them.
- February 11** A Hampshire County convention held in Hadley protests, "We esteem it as a matter of great grievance that Excize should be paid on any articles of Consumption in a free Republik." They call for a suspension of civil suits while taxes continue so heavy.
- February 26** A mob of 300 gathers in Pittsfield to obstruct the proceedings of the common pleas court and are opposed by a smaller number. They petition the judges to adjourn or suspend civil actions until the next term.
- March** A convention held in Pittsfield resolves that the suspension of law and the adjourning of the courts are of "the most fatal tendency" to a commonwealth and to the liberty and happiness of its people.
- April** A disorderly mob gathers at Northampton where the common pleas court is meeting. They are addressed by Samuel Ely, a veteran of the war and one-time minister who urges them to oppose the court.
- April 9** A Hampshire County convention opposes the suspension of law and defeats a motion that would have allowed the county courts to withhold judgements unless the creditor would lose his money entirely.
- April 12** The Supreme Court and Court of Common Pleas are meeting in Northampton. A crowd gathers there and Samuel Ely harangues them and allegedly attempts to incite a riot. Some "old continental men" defend the courts from the mob, and Ely is arrested and jailed in Springfield.
- May 3** In a partial response to the protests of debtors, the General Court passes a debtors' confession act. This would permit a debtor to appear before a single justice, ac-

knowledge his debt, and promise payment at a future time. This would reduce the cost of court fees for the debtor.

- May 20** The *Boston Gazette* publishes a full account of the downfall of the ministry of Lord North on March 20 and of the appointment of a new government more amenable to peace.
- May 23** Twenty-one-year-old Deborah Sampson of Middleboro, posing as Robert Shurtlieff, is mustered into Capt. Eliphalet Thorpe's company at Worcester. She receives a bounty of sixty dollars for enlisting for three years of service in the Continental Army and marches with her company to West Point. (Deborah Sampson was honorably discharged on October 25, 1783.)
- June 13** A crowd of 120 men march from Northampton to Springfield and release Samuel Ely from jail. They are pursued by Sheriff Elisha Porter and 50 troops. There is a slight scuffle, in which Ely escapes. To avoid further bloodshed, Ely's followers hand over their hostages as guarantee that they will produce Ely.
- June 18** Six hundred insurgents march on Northampton to release the hostages given on June 12. Bloodshed is avoided when the hostages notify the mob that they were not to be released until Ely is surrendered.
- June 27** Largely because of the troubles in Hampshire County, the General Court suspends habeas corpus privileges for six months and passes a lower fee table for court cases.
- July** A law is passed establishing the Supreme Judicial Court in Massachusetts as provided for by the constitution.
- July 3** To alleviate the personal debt problems, the General Court passes a personal property tender law for one year which enumerates cattle, sheep, swine, flour, grain, and merchantable pine boards as acceptable tender after appraisal by three disinterested parties.
- August 7** At a county convention held in Hatfield some 44 towns send delegates. They reaffirm their loyalty to the country and to the commonwealth and their support of the war, but they offer several grievances: unjust taxation, high government salaries, lack of knowledge of appropriation of taxes, and a desire to reduce the number of justices sitting in the courts.
- August 19** The *Boston Gazette* publishes an account of Richard Oswald's discussion with Franklin in April in which the independence of the United States and the cession of Canada were considered.

- September 24** A Mob in Berkshire County rescues a pair of oxen taken by Sheriff Caleb Hyde in the execution of a judgment. Hyde raises sixty people against the mob and arrests twenty-one rioters.
- October 20** Delegates from twenty-seven towns meet in Hatfield. Their resolves are less radical than the ideas presented in Deerfield a month earlier. State and national debts are discussed. To the argument that the people should acquire by honest industry the money to meet the public debts they point out "that it would be impossible to do so while the claims of the government were so imperious, and the demands for an immediate revenue so urgent."
- November 17** French artillery reaches Dedham en route to Boston when it will be loaded on French vessels and returned with the troops.
- December 1-5** Rochambeau's troops, en route from Yorktown to Boston, cross from Rhode Island into Massachusetts. They hold their fifty-third camp at Wrentham on December 1, 2, 3, 4, and their fifty-fourth camp at Dedham on December 2, 3, 4, 5.
- December 24** The French army sails from Boston.

1783

- March 19-20** A convention of several towns held in Hatfield votes to pay no taxes to the state.
- March 25** A convention of several towns held in Hadley votes to call a more general convention on April 15 to consider their "heavy burdens."
- April 4** The *Astrea*, Captain Derby commanding, arrives in Boston with the first printed copy of the Declaration of the Cessation of Arms.
- April 7** The *Boston Gazette* publishes a full account in this issue of the text of the preliminary treaty agreed upon in Paris on November 1782.
- April 19** Cessation of the war and the triumph of independence formally proclaimed.
- May 20** A mob of sixty men meet in Springfield and resolve themselves into a convention. They arm themselves with bludgeons and plan to take over the court but are

thwarted by the people of the town and a number of them are arrested.

September 3 The Peace of Paris between Great Britain and the United States is signed, ending the War of the American Revolution. The official news is received in Boston some two months later.

September 29 A convention of seven towns is held at Deerfield "to take into consideration the deplorable state of the county and commonwealth." They are concerned about the possibility of a "general bankruptcy," and they ask that the courts be removed from Springfield to Northampton. They vote to call a meeting of all county towns in Hatfield on October 20.

October 20 The General Court votes for tariff duties on wines, liquors, tea, pepper, sugar, molasses, cocoa, and coffee and a 5% *ad valorem* duty on other goods imported into Massachusetts, the income to go to the United States to help pay the principal and interest on the war debt.

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